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ABSTRACT

The American Psychological Association's adoption of the Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients has the potential to change the education and training approaches in psychology graduate programs and internship settings. Current research suggests that many graduate students do not receive adequate information about sexual orientation issues. The Guidelines provide clear suggestions for exemplary practice with this population and may be used as a model curriculum for the development of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) courses. The Guidelines may also be used as a framework for graduate programs and internships to evaluate the existence or depth of their current training experiences in LGB psychology. This may lead to formal criteria and impact accreditation issues. By endorsing the Guidelines, the APA suggests or recommends that their use is an important step in helping to provide a high level of professional practice by psychologists. The three guidelines related to the education and training of psychologists are discussed in detail. (Contains 12 references.) (MKA)

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Abstract

The adoption of the APA Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients in 2000 has the potential for changing the education and training approaches in psychology graduate programs and internship settings. Current research suggests that many graduate students do not receive adequate information about sexual orientation issues. The Guidelines provide clear suggestions for exemplary practice with this population and may be used as a model curriculum for the development of LGB courses.

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Using the APA Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients in Education and Training

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Holly Near sings a wonderful song that is often heard at LGB rallies, marches, and demonstrations. The song honors lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as a "kind and gentle people," who are singing for their lives. In addition to being a kind and gentle people, those of us who work toward changing how society and mental health professionals perceive LGB people, must also be a hopeful and persevering people. Collectively, we have been singing for our lives and the lives of those we work with through our teaching, research, and clinical work for a long, long, long time.

As I began to think about what I wanted to say about using the Guidelines for education and training purposes, I reflected on what, if anything will be different about having Guidelines endorsed by the American Psychological Association. After all, there have been many excellent articles and books that have articulated the need for psychology graduate programs and internships to teach students about the lives of LGB people. Many of these resources are cited in the Guidelines. These authors have made very specific suggestions about the content of a comprehensive curriculum as well as the need for LGB training and education to prepare psychologists to practice competently. Not all of these articles have been recent. For example, Joe Norton wrote an article in 1982 entitled, "Integrating gay issues into counselor education." This has been followed by many other articles including Buhrke & Douce's article in 1991 that urged psychology departments to

integrate information about LGB lives into academic coursework. In 1998, the APA Monitor had an article by Ruth Fassinger that provided specific examples of how to incorporate LGB content into undergraduate psychology coursework. Despite these and other useful articles and books, has anything changed? Are graduate programs and internships offering comprehensive training in LGB issues? Do students today feel more knowledgeable and comfortable working with LGB people as a result of their graduate training?

Well, there has been some improvement compared to the days when the majority of psychology departments taught about homosexuality as a perversion and advocated aversion therapy, however, let us say that there is still a lot of room for improvement. In 1998, Phillips & Fischer asked graduate students in clinical and counseling psychology programs about their exposure to LGB psychology. Overall, they found that students received little didactic instruction; had few required readings, and had very limited hours of didactic practicum training (the mean was less than 3 hours). When asked if they felt prepared to work with LGB clients, most reported that they felt "ill-prepared" to counsel LG clients and even less prepared to work with bisexual clients. This is similar to the findings reported by Allison, et al's 1994 study which found only about 1/3 of the graduate students felt confident about the quality of their work with LGB clients. Ruth Fassinger and I are exploring the amount and types of exposure students have to LGB issues in internship settings. We have some preliminary data that suggests that although most counseling center internships offer some didactic training in LGB issues but the average time spent on the topic was only 4 hours.

Not only are students inadequately trained in LGB issues, but the academic climate regarding LGB issues continues to be very cold. In 1996, Pilkington & Cantor surveyed graduate students to assess whether their graduate programs in clinical, counselor or school psychology manifested heterosexual bias. They found that less than 25% of the graduate programs included instruction about sexual orientation issues. They also described experiences reported by students that depicted harmful behavior and attitudes toward nonheterosexual orientations. Many students reported the faculty's use of biased textbooks that focused on homosexuality as pathology; instructors who made offensive comments and experiences of discrimination and bias based on their sexual orientation.

What is the implication from this? Well, we know from several surveys that gay men, lesbian women, bisexual men, and bisexual women seek psychotherapy in greater proportions than heterosexual women and men (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Bradford & Ryan, 1988; Moss, 1995; Nystrom, 1997). Combine that information with reports that the next generation of psychologists continue to feel that they have not received adequate education and training in LGB psychology and we can speculate that LGB clients are not being served well.

So, we know four things: 1) heterosexual bias in psychotherapy negatively impacts the therapeutic process; 2) graduate students continue to experience heterosexism and bias in graduate schools; 3) students perceive that they are not adequately trained to provide services to LGB clients; and 4) that implementation of suggestions provided by previous research for improving the curriculum has not occurred on a grand scale.

It is also important to note that the Guidelines do not address issues faced by people who are Transgender. Research on education and training about LGB issues has not fully examined to the extent to which transgender issues are being addressed in graduate programs. This is an important area for more research and education.

So what can the Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients do regarding education and training?

Hopefully, the Guidelines will be viewed as a model for the development of distinct LGB courses as well as identify specific LGB topics that can be integrated within the existing core areas of graduate study. The Guidelines could also be used as a framework for graduate programs and internships to evaluate the existence or depth of their current training experiences in LGB psychology. This could lead to formal criteria that would operationalize the diversity requirement for APA-accredited programs with respect to LGB issues. The APA accreditation diversity criteria specifies that training programs "must develop knowledge and skills in their students relevant to human diversity such as people with handicapping conditions; of different ages, genders, ethnic and racial backgrounds, religions, and lifestyles." Lifestyle is the code word to signify "us."

Although the Guidelines are aspirational in nature, rather than prescriptive or enforceable, it is an APA document. By approving the Guidelines, APA suggests or recommends that the use of the Guidelines is an important step in helping to provide a high level of professional practice by psychologists (p. 1, Guidelines Introduction). The APA endorsement of the Guidelines may be the impetus needed to challenge and support programs to provide better education and training in LGB issues. For programs that might

be reluctant to incorporate information about LGB issues in the curriculum, the guidelines may help by sanctioning instruction in this area.

Learning about LGB issues in not just a cognitive process about acquiring information, it also requires students to explore their own personal feelings and biases toward homosexuality and bisexuality. The Guidelines not only suggest content areas to teach but also underscore the importance of examining one's own attitudes about homosexuality and bisexuality (Guideline 2). Guideline 2 asserts that when practitioners knowingly or unknowingly apply heterosexual norms or explicitly or implicitly hold negative attitudes toward homosexual or bisexual individuals, the provision of services to LGB people will be negatively effected.

The Guidelines are supported by the APA Code of Ethics that urges psychologists to "strive to be aware of their own belief systems, values, beliefs, needs, and limitations and the effect of these on their work (APA, 1992, p.1599). This is particularly important when psychologists are providing services to those who may be different from them. Combined, the APA Guidelines and the APA Code of Ethics may help to legitimatize opportunities for education about LGB issues. Those who educate or supervise psychologists whether in graduate or internship programs are encouraged by the Guidelines to incorporate cognitive and affective components to the training on LGB issues.

The education that most psychologists receive about individual development, couples, family, and relationship issues is usually presented from a heterosexual context. As Garnets et al (1991) found in the psychotherapy bias study, a heterosexual context not only fails to address the issues experienced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals but it

may lead to misinterpreting their experience and providing inappropriate and biased treatment. Therefore not only must students become more knowledgeable about LGB psychology and be aware of their own biases; but it is important for students to become aware of how the traditional psychological literature taught in the curriculum renders non-heterosexual experiences invisible. Consequently, students must not assume that the heterosexual norms found in the literature generalize to LGB people.

The Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients provides three separate guidelines related to the education and training of psychologists. The first (Guideline 14) addresses the training of graduate students and interns in psychology on LGB issues. In addition to what I have already mentioned, one area for discussion is about how to incorporate LGB issues in graduate education. Whether specific courses on LGB issues should be developed or whether LGB issues should be incorporated within other required courses is often debated. The guidelines do not address what structure should be used in teaching LGB psychology. Specific guideline information however, could be incorporated within traditional graduate course content areas such as marriage and family counseling classes, courses on ethnic and disability populations, adolescent psychology, geriatric psychology, as well as classes in human sexuality and human development. LGB issues could easily be integrated in all of the above. As a separate LGB psychology class, the guidelines provide a blueprint for curriculum content to prepare psychologists to adequately provide services to LGB individuals, couples, families, and their families or origin. In fact, the 16 Guidelines would make a good outline for the development of a semester course focusing on LGB Psychology.

The second education guideline (Guideline 15) is targeted toward updating the skills and knowledge of psychologists through ongoing continuing education, supervision, and consultation. Currently, no state psychology licensing boards require licensed psychologists to receive training on LGB issues. The existence of the Guidelines might encourage state psychology boards to recommend or require that psychologists attend CE workshops on LGB issues and provide such opportunities at state conferences. State Boards of Psychology could further emphasize the value of the Guidelines if they were used as a model for competent practice and integrated into the oral examination for licensure. From personal experience providing various CE to mental health professionals, I have found that while the participants indicated that they all had LGB clients in their practice, most never had any coursework or specialized training in LGB psychology. Only a few participants acknowledged ever reading a book or journal article that addressed the topic. For the majority of these experienced clinicians, this was their first CE workshop on the topic. It would be helpful if there were some type of external motivation to help expose clinicians to this body of knowledge.

The third education guideline (Guideline 16) encourages psychologists to become familiar with current resources that will be of benefit to their clients. An indirect benefit of this guideline is to help psychologists discover the diversity of the LGB community. Since resources frequently change within a community, clinicians need to be actively learning about available resources throughout their careers.

When I began talking, I mentioned the need for hopefulness and perseverance. I have a lot of hope that the Guidelines will make a difference in the education and training of psychologists. It will take a lot of perseverance to hang in there while institutions

gradually change. However, I think that this is an important moment in history to build on our past successes. I believe that many graduate and internship programs want to prepare their students to work with LGB populations but may not have known what information should be included. The Guidelines provide a structure to begin the development of various types of educational interventions.

We all need to take part in making this change happen. The first step is to download a copy of the Guidelines or pick one up here at the convention. Don't wait until the Guidelines are published in the APA Monitor in December. Next, make a lot of copies. If you are a faculty member or student in a psychology department, distribute a copy of the Guidelines to all the faculty and grad students. Append a note asking to discuss how these guidelines can be incorporated into the curriculum. Address the importance of also having specific courses and seminars on LGB psychology. If you are in a practice group or an agency, do the same. Share the Guidelines with your colleagues, ask that continuing education be provided on LGB issues for the staff. If you work at an internship setting do the same. Also examine the content of the internship's current LGB training to see if it provides comprehensive training that will prepare students to work with LGB clients and their families. Education must be broader than simply teaching students about the coming out process.

We have an opportunity now to build upon the momentum created by the passage of the Guidelines. Our hopefulness and perseverance about the development of the Guidelines has paid off. Now the next task is to be sure that the Guidelines are used to improve the quality of services delivered to LGB people. We will continue to need hope, perseverance, and a commitment to action to accomplish this.

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